

Office of  
the Mayor  
Burlington,  
Vermont



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**STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS**  
**MAYOR BOB KISS**  
**April 4, 2011**

Good evening and welcome. I'd like to extend a special welcome to newly-elected City Councilors David Hartnett in Ward 4 and Norman Blais in Ward 6.

Congratulations as well to those City Councilors re-elected on town meeting day: Sharon Bushor, Bram Kranichfeld, Vince Brennan, Joan Shannon and Vince Dober.

In January, I attended the U.S. Conference of Mayors annual meeting along with mayors from around the country, including Mayor Robert Walkup of Tucson, Arizona. In the wake of the Tucson shootings, Mayor Walkup introduced a "Civility Accord" at the Conference. The accord states that those who sign it must "respect the right of all Americans to hold different opinions," "avoid rhetoric intended to humiliate, de-legitimize, or question the patriotism of those whose opinions are different from ours" and "choose words carefully," among other things.

While Burlington has not faced a tragedy like the one in Tucson, those events should compel us to be attentive to the power of words when we talk to the public, media, and among ourselves about the issues we face.

I invite you to join me in the upcoming year to put partisanship aside and ensure that we create a civil, pragmatic, and constructive atmosphere here in Contois Auditorium as well as in our community. While we may not always agree on the issues, I'm convinced we can agree on these basic principles. This is in the best interests of the city, Burlington residents and businesses and it is simply the right thing to do.

Successful municipal government should put people first, help build a sustainable community, and support democracy, civic participation, and a high quality of life. By and large we've done this by working together – all of us: the administration, City Council, numerous volunteer boards and commissions, active and engaged residents, businesses and non-profit organizations, our representatives in Montpelier and Washington, and dedicated City staff and department managers.

History teaches us that working together has positive results. Despite the severe global economic crisis, Burlington remains one of the strongest real estate and employment markets in the country. Burlington continues to receive accolades from outside observers for our quality of life, vitality, and sustainable City policies.

Nonetheless, managing city government and keeping us moving forward is not without its challenges. We continue to work toward resolving the complicated issues facing Burlington Telecom. The City's financial advisors Dorman and Fawcett are working on identifying strategic and financial partners with the goal of addressing the terminated lease-purchase agreement with CitiCapital, improving BT's overall financial position, and providing the City the potential for recovery against BT's debit to pooled cash. And, the proceedings before the Vermont Public

Service Board have entered the “cure” phase, and over the coming months BT will pursue a plan to address violations of its CPG.

Over the past year, we have made BT more efficient and cost-effective. BT remains operationally cash-flow positive and has not increased its debit since October of 2009. We appreciate the ongoing assistance of Gary Evans and HBC and their unfaltering belief in the potential that BT represents for the citizens and businesses of Burlington. And, despite a proliferation of misinformation and attacks in the media, staff and management at BT have worked hard to maintain high quality services. I want to applaud their dedication to BT and the City and to their customers.

I will continue to fight to preserve Burlington Telecom. I’ve been criticized in some quarters for being too optimistic about BT. I embrace this criticism. There is universal agreement that BT’s fiber-to-the-home system provides tremendous value to Burlington. It represents a 50 year investment in green infrastructure that is essential for economic development and meeting the needs of our community. It has the potential to serve communities outside of Burlington. This administration and this City Council, need to ensure BT’s success, now and into the future. I believe this is what most Burlington residents want us to do.

We face other challenges that go beyond our city limits. The risk of global climate change to our way of life, our health, and economy is the defining issue of this and future generations. Despite the obvious signs and the deadly impact of climate change in developing countries, we are not moving fast enough to resolve this crisis. The things we do now have serious implications for the foreseeable future.



Burlington is a well-established leader in the effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to promote a sustainable future. Last year, in partnership with the Champlain Housing Trust and Burlington Co-Housing, the Home Depot Foundation recognized the City with a \$75,000 award as the top small city in the country for Excellence in Sustainable Community Development. We have made tangible advances in the fight against climate change. DPW introduced the state's first Compressed Natural Gas recycling truck. The library made substantial energy efficiency improvements. City Hall and other downtown offices completed a one year composting initiative. The City joined Carshare and it implemented a pilot commuting program for downtown employees.

The Burlington Electric Department continued its exemplary energy efficiency program for residents and businesses. BED continues to work towards the 100% renewable energy goal that was established by its 2008 Integrated Resource Plan.

Addressing climate change requires everyone's participation. No one should be left out. We need to reach out to old adversaries and form new partnerships and develop new resources. Now is not the time for partisan or ideological battles. We must work together – if not for our sake, then for the sake of our children and our children's children.

In spite of these challenges, we made significant accomplishments over the past year. There is one factor that drives these accomplishments but is often overlooked. That is people, our City employees. City workers maintain roads, repair potholes, ensure reliable power, provide telecom services, deliver clean water and manage wastewater and stormwater systems. They maintain our parks, beaches and other public spaces, plant and prune our trees, plan and coordinate

events and festivals of all types for people of all ages. They embrace and support the arts and music, plow roads and sidewalks in the winter and clean them in the spring. They maintain the vitality of the Church Street Marketplace. They maintain City buildings and recreation facilities. They administer and develop planning policy, support victims of crime, implement energy efficiency and renewable energy goals. They support equity and diversity, enforce codes and ensure safe rental housing, respond to emergencies, prevent and solve crimes. They support citizen participation in government. They support employees and implement good human resource policies, protect the City and taxpayer's legal interests, develop budgets, run elections, and assess properties. They promote literacy and reduce and prevent child lead poisoning. They support City boards and commissions, and help businesses succeed and grow in Burlington. Your tax dollars pay for these and many other city services.

Please join me now in applauding the people who come to work everyday to serve us and all the residents of Burlington.

Some of us are ready to forget one of the most challenging winters on record. As of tonight, Burlington has received 128 inches of snow this season. A record 42 inches in February was followed by an early March storm that dropped 24 inches on the city in less than 24 hours. For four straight days and nights the Department of Public Works employed round-the-clock shifts to clear streets and sidewalks. The Fire Department responded with exemplary service under difficult conditions, at a time when they were needed the most. Other City departments – the Police Department, Burlington Electric Department, Parks and Recreation, the Airport, and the Church Street Marketplace – maintained essential City services and kept

Burlington moving. The City's response to these basic needs is a foundation of our success.

Maintaining and enhancing the City's infrastructure continues to be a top priority. DPW completed year two of one of the most substantial street repaving efforts in Burlington's history, funded by a \$5.5 million bond and 2.0 cent increase to the dedicated tax for street work approved by Burlington voters in November of 2008. Last year, this involved repaving all or part of 46 streets around the city for a total of 8.6 miles of paving. The upcoming year will be the third and final year of a significantly enhanced street paving effort, with the dedicated tax providing sustainable funding to maintain good street quality into future years. During the past year DPW also managed over \$1 million in federal Recovery Act funding to make substantial improvements to the City's stormwater system.

In the City's downtown core, a series of projects already underway and planned for this summer will address infrastructure needs, enhance existing amenities, and promote economic vitality. These projects are made possible by \$6 million in federal transportation funding secured by Senator Patrick Leahy. Lower Church Street and St. Paul Street will be reconfigured with better pedestrian crossings, new curbing, new and enhanced lighting, and an overall improved streetscape. Work on the Church Street Marketplace will update an aging electrical system and improve the crossing at the Cherry Street intersection. Pearl Street between Church and St. Paul streets will see new bike lanes, a widened sidewalk on the north side, and curb bumpouts for greater pedestrian access.

All of this work will be coordinated by DPW with the involvement of the Church Street Marketplace, CEDO, and the Burlington Electric Department. A special



thanks to Senator Leahy without whose support these critical infrastructure improvements and enhancements would not be possible.

The Burlington Electric Department's smart grid project – which will allow customers and the utility to utilize energy more efficiently – continues to move forward. BED significantly improved power reliability with completion of the East Avenue Loop transmission upgrade. Burlington now has a looped feed so if one of three substations goes offline the remaining two could carry the electric load for the city. And, the McNeil Generating Station is now linked directly with BED's distribution system. These improvements mean that in the event of a regional blackout, BED would be able to keep the lights on in Burlington.

BED has also moved forward with under-grounding power lines at the Waterfront – on track to be completed within the year. This will also improve reliability and enhance enjoyment of the Waterfront for residents and visitors alike. With its careful stewardship of ratepayer funds, BED was able to hold the line on rate increases this year.

These improvements in Burlington's infrastructure come at a time when many cities and states are struggling to provide basic services, let alone make long-term investments.

Businesses are continuing to choose Burlington. The Church Street Marketplace reports that vacancies are down to 6 percent from a high of 11 percent. Dealer.com in the south end is expanding to add at least 300 jobs at their Pine Street location. Vermont Energy Investment Corporation has outgrown their current location and is moving into the former General Dynamics building with plans to add to their

current 195 employees in Burlington. VEIC's decision to remain in Burlington, close to services and public transportation, is consistent with their corporate mission to reduce the environmental and financial impact of energy use.

The Planning and Zoning Department reported that development review requests are up 15 percent from the previous year, representing a total estimated construction cost of more than \$44 million in approved development. Construction is expected to begin this summer on a new hotel on Cherry Street, as well as 47 1-bedroom apartments and 59 units of senior housing on North Ave. Construction has already begun by Investors Corporation of Vermont on a new 4-story office building at the corner of Battery and King Streets. Other projects in the works include a total of 112 new residential units, a 400-bed student apartment complex on UVM's Redstone Campus, three student dormitories with a total of 272 beds for Champlain College, and redevelopment of the Moran Plant.

The Burlington International Airport is an economic engine for the greater Burlington area as well as the State. While total passenger numbers were down about 5 percent in FY10, the Airport had a record high percentage of passengers in available seats, an indication that demand remained high. The Airport also took steps to ensure its long-term sustainability. This past year, airfield improvements and the addition of 600 parking spaces position the Airport to be even more successful. And, significant efforts focused on financial strategy have already put the Airport on the right track to improve its bond rating.

Preserving and creating safe and affordable housing continues to be a high priority for this administration. CEDO and the Mayor's Office helped convene a broad-based effort to preserve both the Wharf Lane and Bobbin Mill apartments, two



properties that are home to 88 low-income households with over 200 residents. The Westlake Residential project just completed its payments in lieu of building affordable housing. Over \$370,000 was paid to the Burlington Housing Trust Fund to support the creation and preservation of affordable housing at other locations in the city. Thanks to Housing Trust funding, nearly 100 affordable apartments are under development at the former Thayer School on North Avenue, and Wharf Lane apartments were preserved and will undergo their first major rehab in over 30 years.

Burlington has weathered a national housing market plagued by decreasing property values and foreclosures better than most communities. The Burlington-South Burlington market had the second-lowest foreclosure rate in the nation last year among 206 metro areas covered by RealtyTrac. With the help of federal Neighborhood Stabilization Program funds from the State of Vermont, CEDO partnered with the Champlain Housing Trust to purchase 5 foreclosed homes, perform needed rehab, and resell the homes to low-income buyers.

The Burlington Lead Program continues to make homes safer for children, ensuring that all children can reach their fullest potential. By the end of this year the Burlington Lead Program will have reduced lead-based paint hazards for 300 low income households. The program was so successful in meeting benchmarks in a cost-effective manner that they are stretching a 3-year federal grant over a 4-year period. This spring, the City permit process will begin incorporating a new EPA rule to prevent lead poisoning during renovation projects – recognized by national healthy housing advocates as a best practice at the local level.

Just last month Burlington's Code Enforcement Office completed an amnesty program to encourage landlords to register their rental properties and come into compliance without penalty. This has resulted in 65 additional units that were previously unregistered and, until now, never received a minimum housing inspection. The office was also instrumental in implementing a Unified Certificate of Occupancy, improving the efficiency of the permitting process for owners. Code Enforcement conducted street patrols in neighborhoods and increased compliance with vacant building requirements. Their efforts promote safety and appropriate development for renters and owners alike.

Burlington continues to create and enhance cultural and recreation opportunities for people of all ages. The City's network of parks, beaches and boating amenities draw both residents and visitors to Burlington. This past summer the North Beach Campground set a record for nightly reservations. Waterfront Park hosted numerous festivals and other events, including Burlington's signature July 3 celebration. Parks and Recreation expanded its community garden capacity to meet increased demand. The department also developed Burlington's first "natural playground" at Smalley Park.

Parks and Recreation continues to work closely with the school department to improve services and efficiency of the Burlington Kids afterschool program. This will be a priority in the upcoming year.

The Fletcher Free Library offered an array of services and programs to the community with a special focus on children and families. The 2010 summer reading program was the most successful ever, attracting 1280 young readers who read more than 15,000 hours during the program. Burlington is fortunate to have a

resource like the Fletcher Free Library, supported by the City and with programming that would not be possible without a committed and passionate staff and the involvement of the community, through an active Board and the Friends of the Fletcher Free Library.

The City also improved its pedestrian and bicycle system. DPW, CEDO, and Parks and Recreation worked on a community-initiated project to enhance the 127-bike path trailhead in the Old North End, creating a gateway from and to the Intervale. In conjunction with the Bike-Walk Council, DPW installed new bike lockers at the Marketplace garage for both commuters and hourly use. Forty-four pedestrian countdown signals were installed at crosswalks around the city and 6000 feet of sidewalk was replaced or installed. And, in partnership with the Chittenden County Municipal Planning Organization and Ward 1 NPA, DPW designed and implemented Burlington's and one of Vermont's first "Complete Streets" demonstration project on Pearl Street, with safer traffic flow and a new bike lane.

A broad-based Bike Path Task Force is currently reviewing the needs of the Waterfront Bike Path in the context of Burlington's overall bike-ped network. I appreciate the work of the Task Force and City staff in setting a future course for this critical element of Burlington's recreation and tourism engine.

Burlington's vitality and livability are enhanced by the City's commitment to the arts. Burlington City Arts celebrates its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year. During these three decades BCA established Burlington's public art program. It has sponsored summer concerts in Battery Park and with the Flynn Center it created the Discover Jazz Festival which draws thousands of people to our downtown each June. BCA



also renovated the Ethan Allen Firehouse into the BCA Center, which today is one of the top five most visited contemporary art venues in New England.

Throughout these 30 years, BCA has been committed to making arts programming accessible to all. BCA presents free exhibitions and education initiatives, offers scholarships and subsidized community arts classes and studios. It supports and promotes city-wide festivals and events. BCA and the art and artists it supports add to our City's distinct character and they enhance our vitality and economic sustainability.

The Church Street Marketplace also turns 30 this year. The Marketplace is key to Burlington's vitality and sense of community. The Marketplace is one of the few successful pedestrian malls in the country. It anchors Burlington's commercial and cultural identity and has succeeded in the face of increasingly complex challenges.

Congratulations to BCA and the Marketplace on 30 years of accomplishments. We look forward to another 30 years of success.

There is no doubt that we all benefit from a strong BCA and Marketplace, but the bottom line is that we must feel safe in our community. Burlington's public safety employees have an exceptional track record responding to emergencies as well as meeting the community's broader needs. They perform their jobs so well, we have come to take their professionalism, skill, and commitment to the City for granted.

The City's public safety capacity goes beyond responding to emergency calls. The Fire Department has an active community education program, reaching 2800 grade-school students and 1500 college students every year. The Department

oversees a robust inspection program in place to prevent fires and is also the City's lead department for the increasingly complex area of emergency preparedness.

The Police Department has a well-established and successful community policing program. The Department continues to review its community programs as part of a broad re-assessment and engagement process commenced in 2008-2009. It helped lead Vermont's first collection and analysis of racial profiling data, focused on Chittenden County.

This year marked the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Martin Luther King Day. Burlington has changed over 25 years. The 2010 Census put Burlington's population at 42,417, a 9 percent increase from 2000. Burlington's schools are becoming more and more diverse and the district is one of the few in the state adding students. As a city and a community we should be proactive in ensuring that Burlington is inclusive and welcoming to everyone. In FY10 the City launched the "We All Belong" Initiative with 33 AmeriCorps members serving at 17 agencies, schools and city departments. "We All Belong" seeks to increase cultural competency in public and community organizations and remove barriers to economic, racial and social equity. The Americorps effort joins others in the community already doing this work and that have been doing this work for many years. It is imperative that we continue to prioritize inclusion in the years ahead.

CEDO's Community Justice Center manages an effective graffiti cleaning and prevention program. This program relies on community volunteers and sometimes even graffiti offenders to address graffiti as quickly as possible. The Center coordinates a range of programs that support crime victims, hold offenders

accountable, and help ensure that offenders re-entering their community have adequate support.

Looking ahead, we will continue to build on these accomplishments. Over the next year, the City will coordinate a comprehensive community engagement and planning process involving the Downtown, Waterfront, and Legacy plans. The development of a new Downtown and Waterfront Master Plan is funded by a U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Sustainable Community Challenge Grant - Burlington was one of just 42 communities out of 586 applications to receive this award, with the goal “to reduce the barriers to achieving affordable, economically vital, and sustainable communities.” Burlington will also participate in a related county-wide effort coordinated by the Chittenden County Regional Planning Organization.

At the same time, the Burlington Legacy Project will embark on a community engagement process to update the Legacy Plan. The Legacy Plan has achieved national recognition for its comprehensive view of sustainability and foundation of the four “Es” – Education, Economy, Equity, and the Environment. Its vision has helped guide the community since its inception in 2000 and should continue to do so for many years to come.

We must look for sustainable ways to grow and accommodate changing needs in our community and the world. I urge residents and other stakeholders to participate in these important planning processes.

I cannot talk to you about the future without addressing the projected shortfall in the 2012 budget. Over the last five years this administration has managed to do



more with the same number of full-time equivalent employees that we had in 2004. The tax rate for general-funded services has remained level for the past 6 years. The Clerk-Treasurer's Office and Human Resources Department have reduced workers compensation costs by \$400,000 per year, kept budgeted healthcare costs level over the last three years, and implemented a robust employee wellness program.

These are significant accomplishments. While we recognize these accomplishments, we can no longer avoid the ever increasing cost of providing essential services. And to make matters worse, there are serious federal and state budget cuts looming on the horizon.

I wish that voters had approved the proposed tax increase in March. However, I am still left with the responsibility for proposing a budget that meets the needs of Burlington residents and recognizes the City's flagship role as the largest city in Vermont. As we continue to refine the FY12 budget, I will be looking at possible reductions in the number of city employees or city services. For taxpayers, I understand these are difficult times, just look at the cost of a gallon of gasoline or a gallon of milk, but, I may have no choice but to bring another smaller tax increase before the Council for review, consideration and support before the end of the month, and then before City voters sometime in May. This won't be a decision made easily or lightly or before thorough review.

I believe that Burlington residents have a unique commitment to this City. They value community while recognizing their responsibility and relationship to the rest of the world. We all experienced and will continue to experience the extraordinarily tragic events in Japan. Recently, I reached out to Mayor Kono of

Nishinomiya, Japan, in the wake of these events. Nishinomiya has a relationship with Burlington through the Shelburne Farms Sustainable Schools project. Fortunately, Nishinomiya, Japan's first green city, has been largely spared from serious immediate impacts of the earthquake and tsunami.

Our interconnectedness with the rest of the world also gives us cause for celebration. On March 24 I welcomed the French Consul General and the Quebec representative to New England, to Burlington for a ceremonial raising of a French "friendship flag" outside City Hall. This event celebrated a unique relationship built on shared culture, traditions and economy and on a shared hope for a better world. I'd like to thank the color guards from the Burlington Police and Fire Departments, BCA, the Alliance Française of the Lake Champlain Region, and Ernie Pomerleau in his role as the Honorary French Consul for Vermont for making this so successful an event.

If there were only one thing I could emphasize tonight, it would be our connection to each other—we are a community. At the same time, we face significant economic and political challenges that could divide us. But, despite who we are and where we come from, despite party labels, we have far more in common than not. Our sense of community and responsibility to one another has served us well in the past, and I am convinced, it will serve us well in the future.

Finally, Council members, I'd like to close with the words of Mayor Walkup of Tucson, who said, "most of us are elected officials only for the moment, but we are human beings forever." Let's not forget this as we face the challenges ahead.